

Wildfire Management and Maintenance

Presently, Erie County has upwards of 50 miles of fire lanes (fire breaks) on its 13 lots. We also have approximately 140 private properties (neighbors) directly adjacent to county forests. Good fire management is crucial in the protection of this urban interface (neighbors). Clearing fire lanes is a good forestry practice and helps prevent fires. Generally, there are two ways fires start -- lightening (natural) and human interaction. Current fire lanes in Erie County Forests are inaccessible in many areas. The width is only 10' to 15' with many blow downs, high vegetation and thick foliage. When tree crowns along fire lanes touch, as they do in Erie County Forests, it defeats the purpose of the lanes. When cleared and widened, fire lanes will also provide great access for recreation and forest management practices.

Fire plans generally have a military style design with a command center (incident command systems). Proper utilization of fire lanes can help starve the fire by using choke points to cut the fire off. Protecting the assets of Erie County's forest, neighbors' lives, and property must be foremost in Erie County's fire management.

While it is true that forest fires are rare in this area, Erie County must be prepared. A plan must be in place and properly trained forestry personnel to protect in case of fire will help our readiness. As trained, certified wildland fire fighters, we can develop a plan with anchor points and escape routes, as well as establish safety zones. In addition, the forestry crew received wildfire training at the Brookhaven National Lab in November 2002. It should also be said that on nearly a yearly basis, fires occur in the Adirondacks and Catskill regions. The two vulnerable times of the year are mid-summer (if dry) and late fall when the moisture content in trees is low.



Deadfall can increase the fire hazard in a forest stand.

With proper planning, Erie County can mobilize personnel and equipment quickly to maintain the upper hand on a potential disaster. The Erie County Southtowns also have inadequate water supplies to fight a fire, so planning for more ponds in the County Forest is in the future.